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Montessori education: an expert view

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to delineate Montessori education relying on the review of current literature. Given the background of early childhood education, this method dates back to the early 19th century, and the most influential educator in this method is undoubtedly Maria Montessori. She is an educator having devoted her life to improving the education system for children and is the first female medical doctor in Italy. The years characterized by wars and poverty led her to engage in observation of the education of mentally retarded children and, thus, laid the foundations of an influential education model across the world. She opened her very first school, the Casa Dei Bambini (Children's Home), in Rome in 1907. Today, her education model can be considered among the ones preferred the most and is adopted within both private and public schools in our country.

Keywords: Montessori, child education, cognitive development

INTRODUCTION

The first six age can be conceived as a period that influences human life the most and when the child's personality traits and emotional and physical development are shaped the fastest. It can be proposed that a child is born with a specific genetic potential, which can be utilized to the fullest only with the appropriateness of the environment and support.[1] Educational activities for children aged 0-6 are called preschool education, highly acknowledged by developed and developing countries through adopting diverse methods.[2]

In the preschool period, play is the child's fundamental and indispensable occupation. Play also holds a key role in the child's physical, physical, psychomotor, cognitive, emotional, and social development. What nurtures the child's soul the most may be the play, following affection. Play liberates the child and increases their desire to learn. Thus, movement and play are two essential keywords describing young children.[3]

The sense of self in childhood emerges when starting walking, while the ages of 3-6 are defined as the period of curiosity and assertion. In this period, criticism and intimidation may hinder their assertive power. Consequently, the child that feels worthless begins to develop an insecure self.[4]

Children need support, opportunities, and freedom without harming the environment and themselves to be able to perceive that they can succeed in their behavior. Besides, a substantial part (80%) of the child's mental development is achieved in preschool.[5]

MONTESSORI EDUCATION

Given the background of early childhood education, this method dates back to the early 19th century, and the most influential educator in this method is undoubtedly Maria Montessori. She is an educator having devoted her life to improving the education system for children and is the first female medical doctor in Italy. The years characterized by wars and poverty led her to engage in observation of the education of mentally retarded children and, thus, laid the foundations of an influential education model across the world. She opened her very first school, the Casa Dei Bambini (Children's Home), in Rome in 1907. Today, her education model can be considered among the ones preferred the most and is adopted within both private and public schools in our country.[1]

Montessori especially emphasizes that every child is unique; therefore, education should be individualized, and respect for the child needs to be adopted as the most important principle. In this sense, the child should be allowed to do their own work and learn by themselves. The second principle refers to the first three years of age, when the child's brain acquires all the fundamental knowledge like a sponge. The child also learns by watching the environment. The third significant principle assumes that there are sensitive periods when the child learns specific behaviors more easily. Although these periods differ by child, parents and educators may have to support their development continuously in these periods.[1]

Montessori often states that tailored-made environments need to be created for children to learn and develop, to become independent of adults, and to enjoy opportunities. Household items in their own size and designing rooms in

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such a way that children reach everything are also among the basic principles.[1]

The most obvious feature of Montessori's Children's House is that the furniture is designed to be suitable for children's sizes. In this way, children do not need to ask for adult help. They only need supportive help since their development will be hindered and traumatized if their parents do everything for them.[6]

Two prominent features of the child's soul are that they are busy with a task and do it with a sense of achievement. The child's most significant job is to imitate adults. Their effort to gain independence is also appreciated. As the child sees their own achievement, they will definitely enjoy it and develop, such as giving the child a small mirror and brush to comb their hair or having bathroom items suitable for their height to allow them to wash their hands on their own. While doing their own work, the child may also request support from the teacher. Therefore, parents or teachers must learn to be patient and wait while the child does their work. Providing the child with the necessary support, not too much, and giving unnecessary help should be stopped since this method relies on self-learning.[7]

MONTESSORI CLASSROOM AND MATERIALS

Montessori Children's House accepts children from the age of 2.5-3 up to 6 years. Following birth, the child shows rapid physical development till the end of 2 years. What is most evident is that their mental development is initiated and progresses in this period. The child hears, sees, smells, touches, bites, and, thus, learns about the outside world.[8]

The child often loves to perform an activity as a whole. It gives the child a sense of power and independence for succeeding, no matter how insignificant to an adult. In other words, success brings happiness, and happiness brings repetition and motivation, which is the most fundamental rule in Montessori schools. It is also the case in physical motor development (sitting, turning, stepping, walking). The child attaches pretty much importance to order; repeating some games or movements for a long time both calms them down and makes them happy.[9]

Montessori schools have free, supportive environments for children to do their own chores. Daycare centers primarily offer activities of daily living where the child can try them out on their own to learn (e.g., dressing baby up, undoing knots, putting on keys, unlocking, arranging dinner table, removing dishes, etc.).

The child's growth occurs in developmental stages. Each developmental stage affects all the next stages and loses its importance when the child begins to learn new things. The child must act in the direction where nature pushes them. Thus, if the child is not offered opportunities or they are not supported, they will probably begin to demonstrate abnormalities. The child whose work is inhibited may be psychologically hurt, or the child who is constantly interfered with gradually loses their courage, consistency, and determination. Hence, parents must consider it while raising their children.[10]

In Montessori schools, the teacher clearly shows activities to the child, and they try to do them on their own. The teacher may help the child if they ask for it, but the teacher does not do their activities on behalf of the child. If the child is often hindered when starting an activity, their inner motivation is ruined, leading them to think, "If I start this activity, someone will stop me, then I will not start it." Thus, the child's unconscious mind develops carelessness, discouragement, hesitancy, and indecision. They may constantly be afraid of being hindered, loses the courage to complete what they have started, and ends up with an inferiority complex. At the end of the story, the child's intelligence and ability are ruined. A general characteristic of children with strong characters who cannot put their minds and actions in order is that they get angry quickly. A messy mind, erratic movements, and anger go together. It is easy to suppress the child, but what is difficult is to prepare an environment where they can show wholesome development.[11]

The child's ability to observe and explore plays a role in their learning. The child, who is completely busy shaping their own personality before the age of 2.5 years, does not even play with their peers. Yet, they love to be in the environment and socialize by the age of 2.5-3 years. The child, then, needs to be helped in their journey of observation and discovery. For this, it is necessary to tell the child where to go, to make the preparations together, and to walk with them (not in the stroller) in nature at their pace. They will probably be interested in the environment in this process and look, examine, and explore plants and insects for minutes.[12]

Scholars working on child psychology often focus on the development of the child's ability to imitate, play, and imagine. In the early years, they investigated the impacts of external factors on child development, yet they discovered that the child's mind could do much more than anticipated. Montessori was also among those realizing that the child's learning ability to learn varies by their age. These sensitivity periods were also noticed, particularly in language and vocabulary learning. It was discovered that a 3.5-year-old child can incredibly acquire what they hear and looks at and quickly memorize the books read to them, the drawings of friends. In this regard, Montessori emphasizes the importance of teaching children the words about facts, geometric objects, geography, animals, and plants. The previous research documented that a 3.5-year-old child can learn the above-mentioned concepts more easily than a 5-year-old child.[13]

There is a plan to which the universe is entirely subject, and everything in nature continues its development in accordance with its own development law. The urge to protect offspring and preserve the kind is certainly one of the strongest urges in nature. Every living thing in nature has duties for the common good of the universe, apart from following the route of its own lineage. The secret of a happy life lies in pleasant works. While playing with toys at home, the child should be shown the fine details of playing gently and observed only for their own dealing, saying, "You can do it, too." It is the respect to the child to do activities they are interested in with them. Yet, they need to be explained and shown the limits against their actions to harm themselves, the environment, or an object.[14]

Since the child's learning of adult life should be like playing a game, it may be helpful for them to use brooms, cloths, jugs, glasses, and spoons suitable for their size at home. Games and activities should always be staged from easy to difficult to ensure eye-hand coordination and control. It is important for the child to do something willingly and by trying, and each child's development is unique. In this sense, Maria Montessori always adopts the ideas of freedom and independence in the education of children. The child learns to be independent of the parents taking care of, feeding, and dressing them so that they can exhibit their inner nature, which, in turn, grants them freedom. Those responsible for raising the child should allow them to learn and do and should not serve them not to leave the child dependent on them. The child is weaned and begins progressing on the risky path of absolute independence. In this path, one needs to remember that a person with too many servants becomes a slave to the servants as a result of becoming more and more dependent on them. Or else, the child may turn into one with no desire to make an effort, ruined capacity, weak mentality, and insensitivity. When a person, who has always been served, suddenly awakens one day and wants to gain independence, they will perhaps find that they no longer have the strength to do so, which is what wealthy families should not forget.[15]

Materials for Daily Living Skills Development

Both physiological and psychological development spring from a single source, life. One sometimes needs not to stain and smother the hidden potential of life but wait for it to unfold itself. Montessori children perform activities called "daily living skills" with astonishing calmness and dignity. There are also materials for teaching emotions, tools, alphabet, numbers, reading and writing, and four operations for the development of the child's mind while learning to use the items used in daily life. The teacher entirely teaches the use of all materials. The use of objects teaches order in the environment. Then, the child is free and makes their choice.[16]

It is critical to refer to nature to raise awareness among children who only enjoy the moment. The child, who knows that animals need human care and that a plant withers and dies when not watered, connects today's memories with a bond of affection to the future. The observations by Montessori for years imply that especially children free in their choices can extract different outcomes from their own thoughts. For example, she discovered that the child participating in the fruit or grain harvest later worked more willingly at the planting time.[17]

Child's Discovery

The toys around the child (at school or home) must be under the control of the material called "Control of Error." For example, it applies to the activity of "knobbed cylinders." A cylinder not put in its actual place will eventually cause several cylinders to be left at the top, or a sequencing error in button fastening will leave one button exposed. Thus, the child realizes the error and achieves perfection by repeating it. Controlling the errors through materials leads the child to use their mind, critical ability, and capacity to see distinctions.

The fact that educational materials are mobile, reusable, and relocatable increases their attractiveness. It is undoubtedly that an attractive toy or a picture attracts the child's attention, but of a shorter span. In the application of Montessori educational materials, it is critical that the child recognizes their limits. The child's mind always seeks to explore the environment and what is new. In other words, the presence of excessive toys and educational materials in the environment will cause distraction and confusion, leading them to lose their enthusiasm.

There are many educational materials in Montessori schools besides activities of daily living. Children are provided to see, feel, and perceive differences in learning. The fact that the differences are primarily opposites is also the basis of the learning steps. The child, who perceives the difference between a flat surface and a rough surface, can then understand their subtle differences, which also applies to materials with weight, size, and sound differences.

When it comes to colors, for example, the child learns red and yellow first in matching or ordering slightly different materials. The entire order is shown in the activities from left to right and top to bottom, which may be a simple guide to the Latin alphabet. Montessori schools have exclusive materials for visual object education: knobbed cylinders, red sticks, pink towers, brown ladders, color tablets, and geometric shapes.

There may be mistakes in playing with the materials in Montessori schools, but the child sees the mistakes themselves while playing and finds the right by repeating it; the aim is to learn by mistakes. Finally, everyone applies the rule of putting the materials in their places.

The teacher must teach objects to the child, which consists of three stages. First, the object is shown clearly, its name is called, and the object and its name are coded in the brain. Second, the child has to find and show the object when its name is called. Finally, all learning stages are performed simultaneously by asking the child, "Can you show me the blue ball?" and "What is this?"

CONCLUSION

Montessori education is a curriculum-oriented method to realize the child's inherent desire to learn instead of imposing knowledge on the child. Montessori education and materials are through to make significant contributions to the child's development and learning. The teacher's task is to guide the child; it would be inappropriate to be too intrusive or ignore everything.

In this sense, for Montessori education in the preschool period:

- children should be encouraged to research, communicate, and learn by allowing them to move freely in the educational environment. Moreover, relevant bodies may put efforts into disseminating Montessori education.
- theory and practice books covering Montessori practices can be prepared for preschool education.
- the curricula adopted in preschool education institutions can be enriched with Montessori education practices.

ETHICAL DECLARATIONS

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